
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1640 Kalmia Road, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Marjorie Webster School		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 3, 2012	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	12-200	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Architect Bill Gridley (Bowie Gridley Architects) representing the Lowell School, seeks conceptual design review for a three-story addition to Parkside, a classroom building on the former Marjorie Webster school campus.

Property History and Description

The Lowell School campus contains four buildings associated with the former Marjorie Webster School and Junior College, as well as a nineteenth century springhouse. Of the four school buildings, the Main Building and Webster House, both constructed in 1928 in the Mediterranean Revival style, were determined to contribute to the historic district. The 1949 dormitory and classroom building (now used exclusively as a classroom building known as “Parkside”) and the 1965 Fraser Hall were determined to be non-contributing.

The property’s site plan and natural topography are among its most distinctive features, with the picturesque Main Building sited midway up a steep hill overlooking the campus and tall trees behind forming a natural backdrop. The Webster house serves compositionally as a gatehouse at the Kalmia Road entrance. Parkside is deferentially sited with a low profile at the western edge of the campus.

The design of Parkside was influenced by the International Style, with a simple rectilinear, double-loaded corridor plan, multi-light steel casement windows, and a general absence of detailing. It illustrates modest attempts at relating to the campus’s Mediterranean Revival buildings in its use of stucco cladding, red brick window sills and molded brick cornice. The building’s original entrance was oriented away from the campus on to 17th Street and Rock Creek Park.

The campus was determined to be significant under National Register Criterion A as the site of the Marjorie Webster School and Junior College, an early example of a private institution focusing on the educational needs of working women. The site was also determined significant under Criterion B, for its association with Webster, a significant figure in the development of education for women in Washington, and Criterion C, as a unique and intact example of a small, privately-funded and developed college campus whose buildings reflect a coherent architectural theme.

Proposal

The project calls for renovating Parkside, with removal of through-wall HVAC units and replacement windows to generally match the existing multi-light appearance. An addition would be constructed on the building's east side facing the campus. In addition to housing a new blackbox theater, library, and art studio spaces, the addition would serve to more definitively orient the building to the interior of the campus with a new stair, entrance, and lobby. The 17th Street entrance would be converted to a wall of windows with a single door; the stairs would be removed and the landing converted to a balcony.

The addition would be clad in stucco with punched windows, an articulated glass curtain wall opening to the new entrance, and a curved tower element housing the stair and demarcating the new entrance.

Evaluation

The addition is intended as a contemporary interpretation of the Mediterranean Revival, with smooth stucco walls, window proportions, and detailing (red brick sills and terra cotta coping) that reference the existing building and the contributing buildings in the historic district. The addition's relatively small size, height and placement would maintain the building's low profile so that it so that it does not compete with the Main Building, while the new tower would add a picturesque element that would improve the compatibility of Parkside with the character of the campus. The applicants have studied a variety of options for the proposed tower; their preferred option includes a clock at apex of a vertical bank of windows.

Due to its proximity to Rock Creek Park, the project is subject to review by the US Commission of Fine Arts under the Shipsted-Luce Act. An earlier iteration of the design received general conceptual approval from CFA, with relatively minor suggestions for design refinements to the tower, glass curtain wall, and ensuring an overall cohesiveness between the existing building and the addition; HPO had similar concerns about the initial concept. CFA and HPO staff have since coordinated their comments, and the architects have addressed them successfully in the present design.

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the conceptual design to be compatible with the character of the historic district and delegate final approval to staff.